



A century of service
to Canadian shoppers

The series of articles contained in this booklet first appeared in The Toronto Daily Star during the month of January, 1969, and has been reprinted as an expression of our sincere good wishes to Eaton's on the occasion of the Company's 100th Anniversary.

Brend Howard

TORONTO STAR LIMITED

Eaton's: The big store is now 100 years old

★ *The T. Eaton Co., Canada's biggest retailer and the nation's fourth-largest employer, is celebrating its centennial. The following is the first article of a series on what resulted when Timothy Eaton, a 35-year-old Ulsterman, paid \$6,500 for Jennings' druggood store and stock and opened for business Dec. 6, 1859, on the southwest corner of Yonge and Queen Sts.—where Simpson's main store now stands.*

By JOHN BREHL
Star writer

In Scotland—a Scottish evangelist once remarked—children were reared on porridge and the shorter catechism; in Canada, on corn flakes and Eaton's catalogue.

Two years ago, when the Fingal Baptist Missionary Society in Talbotville, Ont., asked members to bring in a book that had a spiritual meaning to them, one woman brought a 1902 Eaton's catalogue.

There are social historians who would say that the gap of only two years between the 100th anniversary of Confederation in 1867 and Eaton's centennial this year is a fitting symbol of the firm's place in the scheme of Canadian things.

There have been a lot of changes, of course, since the days when—as a government inquiry showed in the early 1930s—Eaton's was doing 53 per cent of Canada's department store business.

Politicians and other people no

longer weep quite so much with delight at Eaton's smile or tremble quite so much with fear at its frown.

It's doubtful if even a company publication would write today of any business leader, as an Eaton's company book did in 1919 of founder Timothy Eaton:

"He reminds one of Cromwell smashing into the effete Parliament of Charles I; or of Cecil Rhodes founding a commonwealth among the savages."

(In Timothy's presence, at an Eaton Christmas dinner, Rev. William Patterson compared Eaton to Wellington and to Lord Nelson. At Timothy's death, other clerics looked to the Bible: Nathaniel Burwash likened him to David and Methodist minister T. E. Bartley said Timothy was like Joseph.)

In contrast:

"If I were so bloody powerful, the Eaton Centre (an Eaton plan for development of the site of Toronto's old city hall which flourished in controversy) would be a going concern today," recently remarked John David Eaton, Timothy's 59-year-old grandson, fourth president and publicity-spy sole owner of the Eaton empire.

Still, he's pretty powerful. And Eaton's is vast.

And, in the age of the multi-national corporation, it is unique in still being a private company, wholly owned by the tradition-loving man who sits in an office with a doorway but no door on the seventh floor of the Queen St. store.

As a private firm, Eaton's keeps its finances secret.

But John David—and Eaton's—is reckoned to be worth at least \$400 million.

"I'd like to see it," he remarked sardonically recently when asked if the estimate was true.

The Eaton tradition has been to keep capital intact and the business growing as a sort of trust to be handed on.

Not that the dynasty founded by Timothy—who kept three chickens in a run behind his Gloucester St. house when he first came to Toronto—has failed to live up to its ranking in any "Birks." Peerrage of Canada, what with yachts, private trains, airplanes and helicopters.

Once the family gave Timothy a Detroit-made Pkard car for Christmas. When it looked as though a snowstorm would delay its arrival in Toronto, John C. Eaton, Timothy's heir, chartered a train to bring the car.

John C. himself lived in baronial splendor in a 50-room, 14-bathroom mansion, Ardwood, on the crest of Davenport Rd. hill at the corner of Spadina Ave. Ardwood, which has since been razed, was valued at \$300,000 when Eaton died in 1922.

When John David's Dunvegan Rd. home was burglarized last summer, the value of the jewels stolen was given as \$1,000,000.

As regular as time, it's rumored that Eaton's is about to be sold to outsiders. This fall the word was that a U.S. firm was to purchase the company.

Wearily, Eaton executives denied it, as firmly if not as graphically as did John C. Eaton half a century ago when he told directors: "There's not enough money in the world to buy my firm's name."

Probably better-founded is the Bay St. belief that eventually Eaton's will become a public company, with shares offered to the public, a move believed inevitable because of the growing tax difficulties encountered in handing on a privately owned company.

Says John David: "Certainly we think about it. But so far we haven't done anything about it."

When and if they do, it will be the financial story of the decade.

Eaton's is Canada's biggest retailing chain, one of the half dozen or so largest in the world.

While Simpsons-Sears and other firms have increased their percentages of the retailing market, in 1966 Eaton's led with an estimated 40 per cent of the retail trade. Simpsons-Sears was next with 28 per cent.

In the 1967-68 fiscal year, Simpsons-Sears, a public corporation,

rang up \$470,238,000 in net sales, with a net profit of \$12,792,000—an indication of Eaton's wealth.

The statistics Eaton's does release give some clue to the huge extent of John David's empire, a realm so vast that one reasonably important Toronto executive, asked for his impressions of the president, replied: "I've never even spoken to the man."

● Eaton's is the fourth-largest employer in Canada, after the federal government, the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways. Its 50,000 year-round employees are augmented to 65,000 at Christmas—the same number of persons as the total population of Burlington, Ont., in 1966.

More than 15,000 Eatonians work in Toronto alone.

Every day, the firm's central division alone—Ontario—sells 350,000 separate items of merchandise.

That's as if every man, woman and child in Greater Edmonton lined up to buy one thing each.

● John David is sole owner of 48 department stores across Canada, 5 warehouses and service buildings with retail outlets and 352 catalogue sales offices.

● In addition to being the biggest department store chain, individual departments are among the largest in their fields.

For instance, Eaton's has more than 30 restaurants, snack bars and employees' eating places. Last year they served about 20 million persons. More than 8,000,000 eaters were served in Metro Toronto alone.

● If all the pages of the 18 million copies of Eaton's nine yearly mail order catalogues were laid side by side they'd make a strip of paper 21 feet wide around the equator.

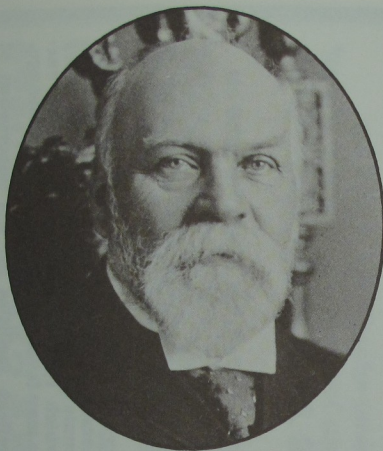
● In Metro alone, Eaton's gets more than 100,000 telephone calls a day over its 740 lines and 3,640 answering sets.

● And, in Metro alone, in Canada's most costly real estate area, Eaton's has 2,541,339 square feet of selling space and another 3,543,075 square feet of warehouse and service area—a total of more than 6,000,000 square feet, or about 138 acres.

Statistics are just statistics and money, while pleasant, only money.

Eaton's special status lies in the way it has reflected, and, in some ways, helped shape, Canada. It's been a business with personality, love and hate.

Goods bought from Eaton's helped settle the west. Immigrants



Timothy Eaton kept three chickens in a run behind his Gloucester St. home when he first came to Canada from Ulster. Now the dynasty that he founded is the country's fourth-largest employer.



Original Eaton store opened for business in 1869 on the southwest corner of Yonge and Queen Sts. Even now in the age of corporations the Eaton empire is still under the control of one man.

learned English by matching words with pictures in the Eaton books.

Indians called the catalogue the "Wishing Book."

It served as a cut-out book for lonely children; boiled down, it colored Easter eggs; it stirred dreams and opened windows to other worlds for many.

In 1927, American aviator Cy Cadwell visited Newfoundland and wrote of the girls who "read Eaton's catalogue . . . and other uplifting bits of literature and right away they get a hankering to beat it out of here so fast that the cod-fish and the salmon disporting themselves in the bay will stand on their tails asking each other helplessly who it was that passed them so quickly."

As early as 1907, a postcard from Hiroshima asked for a catalogue; in the '30s, a card came from the Ukraine to "Hyn's" Winnipeg store, a Philadelphia society matron, told that Eaton's couldn't spare a wedding bureau staffer to go to Philadelphia to arrange her daughter's wedding, brought the

wedding, guests and all, to Toronto.

A Saskatchewan town was named "Eatonia"; the Eaton name, through Eaton money, has been carried on to Toronto's biggest United church, a Trent University building, hospital wings.

Not everybody liked Eaton's.

Toronto columnist J. V. McAree once wrote he could remember when "the Eaton company was, with the possible exception of the old Central Prison, the most unpopular institution in Toronto."

Among the disgruntled were small merchants hurt by the retailing revolution Timothy Eaton started.

Another dissident group was organized labor.

While Eaton's had a thoroughgoing package of welfare and recreational plans for employees, it wasn't noted for high wages.

In 1896, even John J. Eaton, Timothy's nephew, was noting his concern in his personal notebook that 93 per cent of employees were being paid less than \$3 a week,

with an overall average of \$5.30.

Sixteen years later, printer Jimmy Simpson, later a mayor of Toronto, called for a boycott on behalf of locked-out Eaton garment workers, crying: "We want to lick Eaton good and we are going to lick him good. . . . These monuments, hospitals and buildings are donated by the oppressors of the people and paid for with sweat money."

But the people kept buying at Eaton's.

In 1950, when Eaton's Toronto male salesmen were averaging \$54.80 a week and salesgirls \$31.74, an organized drive financed by \$100,000 from big unions failed.

Eaton's, which has since World War II inaugurated a pension plan, claims its staff is paid wages as high as or higher than those prevailing in the field.

Wages in Toronto and four other major cities now average \$105.30 for male and \$72.76 for female employees below managerial levels.

Eaton's strong feelings are famous: Like the refusal to sell liquor

and tobacco, stemming from Timothy Eaton's Methodist convictions.

"This ban will continue, says John David.

But last spring, for the first time, Eaton's began leveling the drapes open on its show windows on Sundays, a minor symbol of changes occurring in the firm.

Eaton's executives want to talk about today and tomorrow, not the past. "Please skip that old line about the catalogue moving out of the privy and on to the coffee table," begs a mail order executive.

The catalogue and store advertising is relatively swinging.

The firm has moved into the computer age, not without some troubles. When the computer was introduced in the billing process, things got fouled up. Hundreds of persons had to be hired to deal with complaints and the crisis cost an estimated million dollars to resolve.

"For God's sake, I'm trying to forget about that," says John David.

BUSINESS SOLD.

I have sold the entire stock of Dry Goods in the Britannia House, corner of Yonge and Queen streets, to Messrs. T. EATON & CO. who will continue the business in the same place, where it has been carried on for the past ten years, and bespeak for them the cordial and generous support of all my friends and customers, assured that they will conduct the business in such a manner as will give every satisfaction.

J. JENNINGS.

Toronto, December 8, 1869.

NEW DRY GOODS BUSINESS!

T. EATON & Co.,

Have purchased from Mr. JAMES JENNINGS his

ENTIRE STOCK OF DRY GOODS,

At a very considerable reduction from the cost price, which amounts to several thousand dollars, every dollar of which they propose to give to those customers who may favour them with their patronage.

With excellent facilities for the importation of their Goods from the British and Foreign Markets, they hope to secure a moderate share of public patronage. Nothing will be wanting on their part to secure this end, by the constant exercise of energy and attention to the wants of their customers.

Business sold said this advertisement in the Toronto Globe, Dec. 8, 1869.

But then Eaton's has sometimes been at its most endearing when things go wrong. Like the time a few years ago when the display staff got a rush call from Toyland.

They'd put 100 rabbits in a runway, never thinking about the fact there were both male and female. Youngsters got a lesson Eaton's hadn't planned.

Not all Eaton's old customers are pleased with the new Eaton's.

A Toronto woman who remembers her father, in the 1890s, singing "Ta ra ra boom de ay, It's Eaton's Bargain Day," says she's now, in her 80s, dependent on phone ordering.

"And they're not what they used to be," she says.

When I told John David this, he smiled.

Eaton's is used to its customers taking things personally.

Timothy Eaton: He started it all

★ Canada's biggest retailer, the T. Eaton Co., a \$400 million family firm with 50,000 year-round employees, is celebrating its centennial this year. This second article in a series tells some of the story of Timothy Eaton.

Perhaps the most revealing of Timothy Eaton's few recorded remarks came when the founder of the mammoth T. Eaton Co. announced to cheering employees another stage in his Early Closing crusade — the then-controversial movement to shorten hours of work and business at his store.

There seems no doubt Eaton was motivated by sincere concern for his employees.

And the Early Closing movement, which lasted through Eaton's first half-century, was strongly supported by clergymen, who extravagantly compared Timothy to various Biblical heroes.

But in a self-deprecatory aside, Eaton remarked:

"People can buy just as much before 5 o'clock as before 7."

The same way humor runs through the family which has con-

tinued Timothy's business.

Asked recently whether he would ever lift the traditional ban on selling tobacco in Eaton stores, first imposed by non-smoking Methodist Timothy, grandson John David Eaton, now president, said no, he would not: "Besides, there's not much money in it."

Ninety-nine years after Timothy Eaton—balding at 35, bearded, blue-eyed, so abrupt in manner he personally was never a good salesman—paid \$6,500 for James Jennings' dry goods business and embarked on his remarkable career, we know little about the inner personality of Canada's greatest merchant.

Contemporary accounts smothered him in reverence. They were little more revealing than the massive statue of him, sculpted by Eaton staffer Ivor Lewis, which has

They propose to keep a well-assorted Stock throughout the year in all

STAPLE HABERDASHERY AND OTHER GOODS.

SOUND GOODS, GOOD STYLES AND GOOD VALUE,

Will be points that will always have their attention. In the meantime, they propose to offer from the present Stock, by way of clearing it off rapidly, and making way for their Spring Imports, the following inducements:—

Over 4,000 yds. WINCEYS from 50c per yd.
Over 13,000 yds. FANCY DRESS GOODS,
newest styles, from 10c per yd.

MOURNING GOODS, STAPLES AND FLANNELS,

Will be given at the same rates. A large lot of new

Velveteen and other Jackets,

VELVET BONNETS, HATS,

And all Millinery Goods, at EXACTLY HALF the market price.

We propose to sell our goods for CASH ONLY.—In selling goods, to have only one price.

We invite an examination of our Stock—and to all we offer our best services.

T. EATON & CO.

And the buyer was a 35-year-old Ulsterman who paid \$6,500 for a drygoods store and became Canada's biggest retailer.

stood in the Queen St. store since the 50th anniversary in 1919.

But apparently Timothy did have some slight humor, a lack of sham, a strong devotion to church and family—and a hard grain of practicality along with the idealistic slogans such as "The Greatest Good to the Greatest Number."

If other Toronto merchants had known Timothy's make-up, they might not have laughed so readily when he moved into Jennings' Britannia House, at the southwest corner of Yonge and Queen Sts.—now Simpsons' main corner—on Dec. 8, 1869.

For they did scoff.

The little store, 24 by 60 feet (Eaton's main Queen St. store now has 864,000 square feet) was several blocks from the fashionable shopping district on King St.

And Timothy was bound to go

broke with his newfangled ideas:

- One price for all, in an era when it was accepted that merchants set their price high to allow for dickering. Yet 30 years later, the Globe reported: "The wealthy drive up in their carriages . . . then there are those who walk for convenience and from necessity, many of them; but all are on a par when they enter this immense building, and that par is cash."

- Cash only. The deposit account system, by which customers put money in advance of purchases and got interest on it, was not adopted until 1904. Charge accounts came in 1939.

Once Timothy wandered by, smiling, as a book salesman adamantly told an indignant woman she couldn't charge her purchase. It was Mrs. Timothy Eaton, who'd

forgotten her purse. The salesman got a raise in pay.

- Satisfaction or money back. In 1952, a man brought to the Edmonston store a plain gold wedding band he'd bought in 1911 for \$10. The girl had changed her mind and it was never used. He got his refund.

- Truth in description of goods. Timothy interfered once when he heard a salesman tell a customer a material was all wool. "No, madam, it's half wool and half cotton," the owner said.

Nowadays, Timothy's principles seem simple. John David Eaton looks surprised when asked how it was that Eaton's, of all the stores in Toronto in 1869, became the Big Store. "It's all in the books," he says.

But in the Toronto of 1869, Timothy's principles—though applied

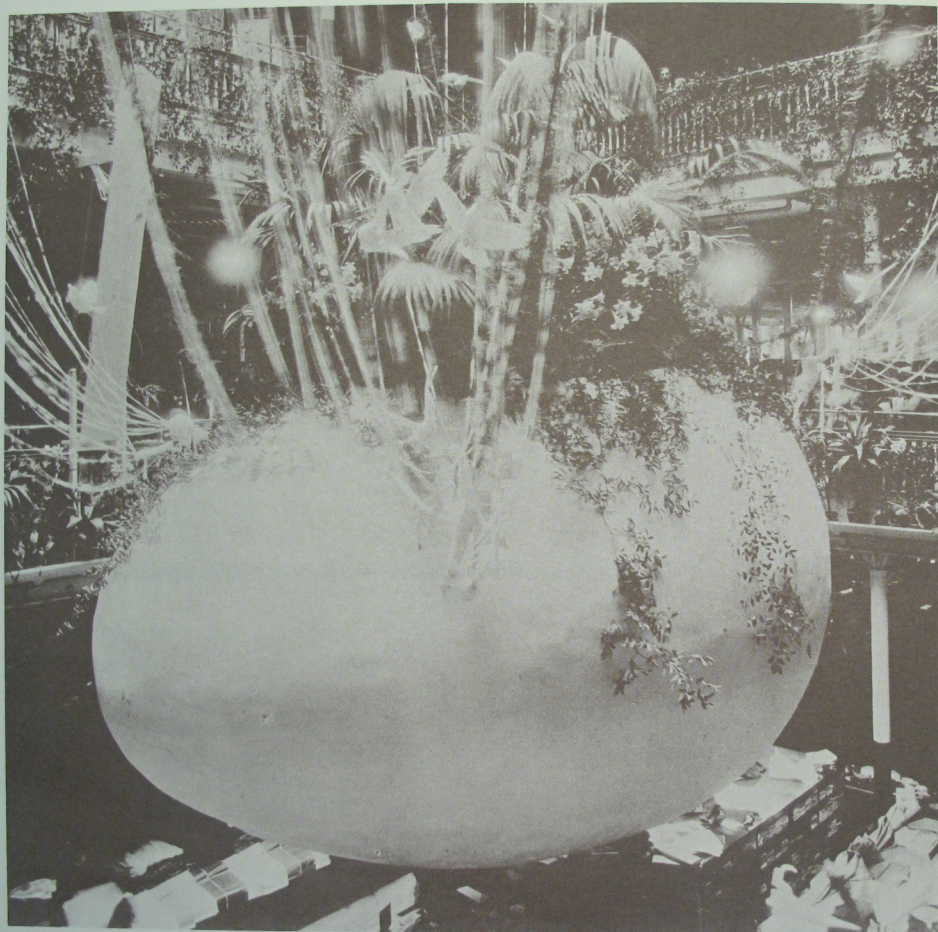
about the same time by several U.S. merchants, such as A. T. Stewart and John Wanamaker—seemed foolhardy.

It was the middle of Queen Victoria's reign. Confederation was only two years old. Toronto had a population of 49,000.

There were no telephones, no typewriters, no electric lights, no daily papers outside Montreal and Toronto. North of Bloor was country and forest and there were sailing vessels on the Humber.

The city hall was at what is now the St. Lawrence Market, Government House and Upper Canada College were on King St. W. Eggs cost 11 cents a dozen, maids were paid \$7 a month, a tailor-made men's suit cost \$16.

But though the city seemed tradition-bound, it was ripe for progress and change. By 1871, the population



Easter 1996: In appropriate splendor T. Eaton & Co. suspended this 21-foot-x-14-foot Easter egg in the well of the main store on Queen St. Inside was an eight-piece orchestra and one piano. Canada's retailing chain is renowned for its sea-

sonal window displays, but sometimes things go wrong. A few years ago when the display staff placed 100 rabbits on a runway in Toyland, youngsters got a lesson in biology.



Hats and handkerchief counter on the ground floor of Eaton's main store on Yonge St. around 1904. From his small beginning in the drygoods store Eaton had moved in 1883 to three shops centred on 190 Yonge St., and over the years

he expanded in every direction, replacing more than a score of small businesses. In 1884 the first Eaton telephone — number 370 — was installed. Now the firm gets 100,000 calls a day.



Timothy Eaton with his son John in his office in 1899. When John C. Eaton took over after his father's death in 1907 the tiny business had become Canada's Greatest Store and Timothy's fortune was estimated at anywhere from \$3,000,000 to \$15 million and a branch had been opened in Winnipeg.

jumped to 56,000—an increase of 7,000 in two years—and by 1874 to 69,000.

Timothy Eaton, the posthumous son of a comfortably-off farmer in County Antrim in Ulster, had grown up in a strict school. At 13, he was apprenticed to a merchant. Once it was agreed he should meet the merchant to get a lift the nine miles to the store. The boy was a few seconds late. The merchant, watching him approach, drove off at the appointed time, leaving Timothy to walk the nine miles.

Timothy tried smoking once, and got sick. One of his store chores was serving liquor to drovers and farmers. He never allowed liquor or tobacco in his own store or home.

After his apprenticeship, Timothy received £100 and set out to join

brothers and sisters already in Canada.

He told once of the first shilling he earned along the way. At Liverpool, immigrants were crowding and shoving to get their tickets. Timothy, strong and young, offered to get the ticket for one harried family man—for a shilling fee.

He clerked briefly in Glen Williams, in Halton County, Ont., then kept a small general store in Kirkton, near St. Mary's.

In the early 1860s, he entered partnership with his brother, James, in a general store in St. Mary's, where he met and married Margaret Beattie, of Woodstock. With Margaret trimming the hats, they opened a millinery department.

But by 1868 Timothy—though

making a fair living—was tired of the barter and credit systems. James kept the store, Timothy took the money and moved to Toronto, where he was partner for a year in a wholesale business.

Once he took over Jennings' store, one of his first problems was to catch shoppers going downtown to the stores on King St.

Somehow, the operators of the horse cars began announcing the Eaton store—though no others.

Eaton's first staff was two men, a woman and a boy, paid respectively \$8, \$4 and \$1.50 a week. Store hours were 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., six days a week.

This was too much, Timothy said—*one account tells of him shaking his head during a Christmas buying rush late one Saturday and remarking it was fine for business but his employees were too tired.*

Over the years he and his successor, John C. Eaton, gradually reduced store hours, against the opposition of other merchants, while employees responded with grateful addresses. In 1918, when John Eaton announced the store would be closed all day Saturdays in summer and Saturday afternoons the rest of the year, the employees collected \$20,000 for an X-ray wing at the Hospital for Sick Children.

Eaton's relations with its employees have been one of the most argued facets of the firm's history.

Timothy Eaton comes across in recollections of early employees as a stern-seeming patriarch.

Mrs. Emily Cowley, who started at Eaton's in 1885, recalled before her death several years ago that he was "very strict with his employees and often scolded us for the mistakes we made. However, his kind heart soon took over and he would end up patting the shoulders of weeping clerks."

Timothy called his staff "associates" rather than "employees." Because they grew too numerous, he frequently invited them to dinner or an evening at his homes, successively on Gloucester St., Orde St. and Lowther Ave.

The company Christmas dinner grew so large it finally had to be abandoned. In 1899, 2,500 employees dined with the Eatons on the store's second floor, seated at half a mile of tables, served by 250 waiters.

Timothy detested labor unions. He figured it was his business how he ran his business. A disgruntled employee once wrote: "He was very much against Labor Day and would fire anyone who looked out

the window at the parade."

Even his adulatory biographer concedes he was in some ways a "dictator" and sometimes seemed "unreasonable."

But instances of personal kindness abound and there is no doubt of his concern for employees' welfare, on his terms.

"Loyalty" was prized—and general. Today 12 per cent of the regular 50,000 Eaton employees have been with the firm for 25 years or more.

A loyal Eatonian could live in Eatonian virtually full-time. At one point, there were two company hospitals for employees, a home nursing service, X-ray and other services.

An Eatonian could camp at the Eaton's boys' and girls' camps, study or swim at the Eaton's Girls' Club, fish at the company lodge, play any sport on a company team, snap pictures with the company camera club, sing or act with company groups.

Some of the togetherness seems quaint today.

When Harry McGee, a one-time carpet department clerk who became a vice-president and director, was feted by 6,000 employees in 1928, staffers sang, to the tune of When You and I were Young, Maggie:

"I walked by the carpets today, Harry,

And thought all the salesmen were slow;

For there I remembered the way, Harry,

You yanked up the stocks from below . . ."

Today we would call it paternalism but, says one Eaton employee, "Remember, those were different times."

Jim Foster, display promotions supervisor for Eaton's central division, who has been with the firm 50 years, says, "We never thought of it as paternalism in any wrong sense. He remembers 10,000 employees once gathering at the Eaton family's palatial King City estate.

From his small beginning, Timothy Eaton gambled on growth and kept putting his money into expansion. "Even after he was one of Toronto's biggest stores, he once recounted his liabilities and then his assets if he was sold out: '\$7, a wife and five children."

He moved fast when he or a staffer had an idea. In the early days, he saw an old lady having difficulty on the single step outside his shop examining merchandise displayed



Mrs. T. Eaton was Margaret Beattie of Woodstock when she married Timothy Eaton in the early 1860s. Their family life was tinged with tragedy. Three of their eight children died in infancy.

outside. By nightfall, the step was removed and a sloping entrance installed.

In 1883, the store, though expanded, was outgrown. Timothy moved north, to three shops centred on 190 Yonge St.

Over the years, he expanded in every direction, replacing more than a score of small businesses—blacksmith shops, a feed merchant, dry goods stores.

In 1884 the first Eaton telephone—number 370—was installed. Now the firm gets 100,000 calls a day in Toronto.

The first Eaton catalogue—a 32-page booklet—was distributed at the Toronto Industrial Exhibition in 1884, the forerunner of the mammoth mail order business.

In 1886, he installed an elevator—and it rode up and down with wax figures before customers could be



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